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Egypt Exploration Fund

GRAECO-ROMAN BRANCH

A LARGE FIND OF GREEK LITERARY PAPYRI

BY DR. B. P. GRENFELL AND DR. A. S. HUNT.

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AFTER four winters spent in excavating the site of Oxyrhynchus, and when most of the earlier rubbish-mounds had been dug down to the level at which papyrus ceases to be preserved, it was hardly to be hoped that discoveries of literary papyri on a quite exceptional scale were still in store for us. Fortune, however, as the event proved, had reserved her most precious gifts until the fifth season, the results of which surpass even those of the first excavations at Oxyrhynchus in 1897.

The mounds of which the excavation had for various reasons been postponed until last winter are situated in the central portion of the site. Only in one comparatively small group of these was it certain that papyri earlier than the fourth century would be forthcoming near the surface. In the other mounds the Roman layers were known to be more or less deeply buried under Byzantine accumulations dating from the fifth century onwards. Hitherto all the chief finds of literary papyri at Oxyrhynchus have been made in the earlier strata, and the experience of former years had not led us to expect very much of importance either from fifth to seventh century rubbish, in which literary pieces are generally scarce, or from the deeper levels in which papyri of any description tend to be in very poor condition. Since it was uncertain whether a continuance of the excavation would be possible in the future, we were anxious to turn over as much ground as possible; and for the greater part of fourteen weeks over 200 men and boys were employed instead of the usual 120. With a largely increased number of hands it is not surprising that last season's papyri, which range from the second century B.C. to the sixth century A.D., occupy 131 boxes, compared with 91 and 117 boxes filled in the two preceding seasons. But, what is much more important, the quality of the new finds is not less remarkable than their quantity. In a rich site such as Oxyrhynchus it is not uncommon to come upon large groups of papyri which have been thrown away simultaneously. These finds generally consist either of letters, accounts, and contracts belonging to one or more private individuals, or else of multifarious official documents from the local archives, while literary fragments are as a rule conspicuous by their absence. Not until last season has any excavator had the good fortune to make a find of this extensive character in which the papyri, instead of being non-literary, had come from a scholar's library.

The first occasion on which this occurred was on January 13th, when we were excavating one of the few remaining Roman mounds. Shortly before sunset we reached, at about six feet from the surface, a place where in the third century A.D. a basketful of broken literary papyrus rolls had been thrown away. In the fading light it was impossible to extricate the whole find that evening; but a strong guard was posted on the spot during the night, and the remainder was safely removed in the following forenoon. Before being condemned to the rubbish-heap the papyri had, as usual, been torn up; but amid hundreds of smaller fragments there were a couple of cores of rolls, containing ten or twelve columns, other pieces containing five or six, and many more one or two columns. How far the pieces will fit together is still uncertain, for the papyri only reached England at the end of April and we have not yet been able to decipher more than a few of the larger fragments. But it is probable that they can be combined to some extent, although the task of fitting them together will inevitably be slow. It is, therefore, impossible as yet to form an exact estimate of the value of the find; but, leaving the small fragments out of account, the MSS. which are represented by one or more of the longer pieces number ten, all belonging to the second or third century. Two of these are poetical, both fortunately non-extant and by authors of the highest rank, Pindar and Euripides. The Pindar papyrus contains, principally at any rate, pæans—i.e., odes of supplication or thanksgiving addressed to a god—and their authorship is proved by a coincidence with an already known Pindaric fragment. The text is accompanied by elaborate explanatory *scholia*. So far we have extracted nine practically complete columns of about fifteen lines each; and there are parts of a good many more. Since the existing fragments of the pæans amount to a bare dozen lines, the papyrus practically introduces us for the first time to this class of Pindar's compositions. The second series of poetical fragments is from a roll containing a tragedy on the subject of Hypsipyle, which, on the strength of certain features in the plot as well as of style, we have little hesitation in identifying with the *Hypsipyle* of Euripides. The scene of the drama is laid at Nemea, and the characters occurring or mentioned are:—Hypsipyle herself, her two sons (Euneus and Thoas), Amphiaraus, and probably Parthenopæus (two of the seven heroes who took part in the expedition against Thebes), and Lycurgus, king of Nemea. The portions of the text recovered up to the present amount to about 100 complete or nearly complete lines, mainly lyrical; but this number will, we hope, eventually be considerably increased.

Of the prose MSS. several belong to extant works, two containing the *Phaedrus* and one the *Symposium* of Plato, the last being the longest papyrus of the find; a fourth has the speech of Demosthenes against Boeotus, a fifth the Panegyricus of Isocrates. Of a MS. of the orations of Lysias one piece contains the conclusion of the speech against Hippotherses, which is lost, and the beginning of that against Theomnestus, which is extant. By far the most valuable of the prose pieces is part of a new history of Greece. The longest fragment of this has not yet been unrolled; but one of the other pieces is concerned with the relation of parties at Corinth to Argos and Sparta in the period succeeding the battle of Nemea in 394 B.C., and in connection with the Corinthian general Timolaus refers to two otherwise unrecorded incidents in the Peloponnesian war. It is clear from the style of the fragment that it belongs to an historical work on a large scale and of first-rate importance, possibly by Ephorus or Theopompus. The other new prose text is a commentary on the Second Book of Thucydides, different from the extant *scholia*, and, since the views of Dionysius of Halicarnassus are criticized, probably a work of the first century.

A few days after this find of literary texts we discovered the remains of a second classical library in another mound. In this the fourth to fifth century layers reached down to a level of

10-15 ft., beneath which were the Roman strata, extending below the crest of the mound to a depth of 30 ft. Here, about 8 ft. from the surface, we came upon a thin layer which throughout an area of many square yards was full of literary fragments, while stray pieces belonging to the same texts were discovered some distance away. The evidence of documents found below the literary texts shows that the latter must have been thrown away in the fifth century; but the MSS. themselves are chiefly of the second or third century. Compared with the first literary find, the second is in point of bulk more than twice as large, and the MSS. probably exceed thirty in number; but as a whole it is hardly likely to prove so valuable, since the papyri have been much more broken up. A hexameter poem of twenty-two lines in praise of Hermes is complete, and there are several pieces containing more than one column of writing; but it is doubtful whether continuous sheets of much length can be built up out of the innumerable fragments, which range in size from some lines to a few letters. This is the more regrettable because the owner of the library was much interested in the lyric poets. His collection included two or three MSS. apparently of Sappho, and one of the dithyrambs of Bacchylides (attested by the title of the roll which still adheres to part of the first ode upon Theseus), as well as a MS. of the meliambi of Cercidas. Since one fragment of the last-named work contains upwards of seventy lines and in the extant remains of Cercidas there are only fourteen, it will now be possible to form a fairer estimate of the fourth century B.C. poet-philosopher of Megalopolis. The authorship of the other MSS. in the second find has not yet been determined.

In another part of the same mound, at the unusual depth of 25 ft., we made what is with one exception the largest find of papyri that has yet occurred at Oxyrhynchus. The bulk of it consists of first to second century documents; but interspersed among these are many literary pieces, some of which are fairly long. Being affected by damp, the surface of most of these papyri requires cleaning before continuous decipherment is possible.

While these three principal finds necessarily overshadow the other discoveries of the season, the latter too present many points of interest. In particular one of the Byzantine mounds yielded pages from fourth to sixth century books of papyrus or vellum in unprecedented numbers. Among these pieces of classical or theological works we may signalize a leaf from a Latin papyrus MS. of the *Catiline* of Sallust, and a vellum leaf (45 lines in all) from a MS. of a lost Gospel. The subject of this is a visit of Jesus with His disciples to the Temple at Jerusalem and their meeting with a Pharisee, who reproaches them with their failure to perform the necessary ceremonial of purification before entering the holy place. After a question and answer, in which the Pharisee describes in some detail the formalities which he had himself observed, Jesus makes an eloquent and crushing reply, contrasting outward with inward purity. There is a certain resemblance between this and the denunciation of the Pharisees in Matt. xxiii. 25, and Luke xi. 37; but the whole incident, of which the account is practically complete and very striking, is quite different from anything recorded in the Gospels. Among the most remarkable features of the fragment are its cultivated literary style, the picturesqueness and vigour of the phraseology, which includes several words not found in the New Testament, and the display of a curious familiarity—whether genuine or assumed—with the topography of the Temple and Jewish ceremonies of purification. The question of the nature and value of the Gospel to which this fragment belongs is likely to provoke much controversy.

The publication of the chief literary papyri from the new finds will begin in Part V. of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, to be issued in 1907, and will be continued in succeeding volumes of the same series. Meanwhile funds are urgently needed in order to complete the

excavation of all the more promising portions of Oxyrhynchus before the concession for the site is given up. For this object at least one more season's work is necessary. Subscriptions for the Graeco-Roman Branch should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. H. A. Grueber, at the offices of the Egypt Exploration Fund, 37, Great Russell Street, W.C. Subscribers of one guinea are entitled to the annual volume.



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